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SUBJECT: IRAN REGIONAL PRESENCE OFFICE DUBAI: WINDOW ON IRAN - JULY 15, 2009

CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy Richardson, Acting Director, Iran
Regional Presence Office, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (S) Iranian Doctor Alleges Many More Deaths Than Officially Acknowledged: A gynecologist applying for a visa in Dubai described a frenetic scene in the hospitals during the unrest sparked by the disputed election. He was called in to provide support and ended up working three straight shifts - even though he does not typically support emergency room operations. He said the private Tehran hospital where he works took steps to prevent the IRIG from identifying the wounded by both quickly discharging patients following treatment and by deliberately collecting incorrect information from the patients, such as writing down the wrong name or address. Personnel at the government-run hospitals, he understood, were forced to collect accurate information. Government authorities came to the hospital to identify those treated during the unrest but such visits have now stopped. The doctor's wife said she had heard from an eye surgeon that he had operated on 15 patients who had suffered eye wounds after being shot with rubber bullets. The couple alleged that at least 200 people died during the unrest, basing their claim on comments from other doctors, who had all said 15 or had died at their respective hospitals. It is now rumored that the government has paid off the families of those killed to keep them quiet. Comment: The doctor and his wife were open in their criticism of the IRIG and, interestingly, are themselves vivid examples of some Iranians' fixation with Britain's supposedly malign intentions toward Iran. While they did not allege that the UK was responsible for the unrest, as the IRIG asserts, they generally held the UK responsible many of Iran's current problems. The doctor's comment regarding what happened in the hospital where he works seemed to accurately reflect what he saw and heard first-hand, but given the couple's penchant for conspiracy theories, it is impossible to gauge the accuracy of the other rumors they heard. That said, there is strong anecdotal reporting to suggest that the number of those killed and seriously injured is higher than the IRIG's officially reported tallies.

12. (S/NF) Revolutionary Guards Take Prominent Role in Recent Political Detentions: The family of detained economic analyst Bijan Khajepour has been told (unofficially) by a senior judiciary official that he is under the control of the Revolutionary Guards, rather than the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, as the family first suspected. The same source told them that Khajepour was moved from Evin Prison to an unknown location several days ago. Comment: If confirmed, the IRGC, which was reportedly also responsible for the re-arrest over the weekend of Iranian-American Kian Tajbakhsh, is moving into territory traditionally dominated by the MOIS. A Dubai-based friend of Tajbakhsh, who has had his own problems

with Iran's intelligence service, told us that Tajbakhsh was in good standing with his MOIS "parole officer" at the time of his re-arrest and was abiding by the terms of his "probation" (i.e., not engaging with international organizations).

13. (S/NF) Austrian Ambassador to Tehran Pays Price for Supporting Saberi: Austria's Ambassador to Tehran will be leaving Iran early after pressure from IRIG officials unhappy with his activism on behalf of the Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi, according to a Dubai-based Iranian political consultant. The long-standing IRPO contact said that earlier this week he approached Austrian diplomats to request that they quietly lobby the IRIG on behalf of Bijan Khajepour, his former business partner and a prominent analyst, who was arrested last month upon his return from a business trip to Europe. The Austrians, who know Khajepour well, explained that they had spent all their "political capital" on behind-the-scenes advocacy for Saberi's release from prison earlier this year, and that as a consequence Ambassador Postle is being "forced out" of Iran early. Comment: If accurate, the early departure of the Austrian Ambassador suggests that even the influence of Western governments usually viewed with less antagonism by hardliners is diminishing.

14. (C) Some Working Class Iranians "Oblivious" to Recent Unrest: An Iranian engineer and factory owner observed that the three dozen workers at his small valve manufacturing plant 30 km outside of Tehran were mostly "oblivious" to the recent unrest over the disputed election. He explained that after the first week of large-scale demonstrations, which were covered (to an extent) by state media, many working class Iranians had little awareness of the continuing turmoil. His employees, who don't

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use the Internet and do not live or work near the locations of the subsequent protests, expressed skepticism when the factory owner recently suggested that election controversy was not yet over. Our contact added that while his employees do have access to satellite television, they tend to be wary of foreign news channels and assume that like Iranian state television and radio, all media promote political agendas. The factory owner said that "all but two" of his employees told him they voted for Ahmadinejad, and pointed to the 50,000 toman (\$50) vouchers they received at an Ahmadinejad rally just before the election as having won them over. Our contact said he jokingly warned his employees that they should complain directly to Ahmadinejad when he has to close his business and the factory as a result of the failing economy. Comment: The attitude of the factory workers suggests that the state's monopoly of media remains an effective curb on information, particularly for Iranians without access to the Internet. The workers' attitude also shows that there are Iranians who supported Ahmadinejad and will not question the subsequent government's legitimacy.

15. (C) Economic Constraints Prevent Factory Closure in Support of Mousavi: The same factory owner said that he had been unable to close his factory in solidarity with the demonstrators, despite his own wish to tangibly support the movement. He explained that outstanding loans as well as unfilled orders meant that they could not close down temporarily without risking the complete collapse of the company, which manufactures gas valves for LPG cylinders. Our contact said that he and the factory manager had even explored the possibility of speeding up production to stockpile inventory so that they could shut down for a few months, but had concluded that even this approach was not feasible. Comment: This anecdote tracks with what we have heard from numerous small business owners and even some public sector employees, who say that they are too economically vulnerable to risk losing their businesses or jobs by participating in a strike.

¶16. (S/NF) Institute in Orumiyeh Voluntarily Closes to Avoid Post-Election Trouble: The director of a private English-language institute in the northwestern city of Orumiyeh told us that he had chosen to close the institute voluntarily during the recent unrest to avoid the attention of authorities. The local office of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance had ordered the institute closed about two months ago amid an inquiry of charges that it was "introducing Western culture." After a week, the director said, he and his partners succeeded in getting well-placed officials in Tehran to intervene and re-opened the school. The decision to close after the election was made to avoid any appearance that the institute was in any way involved in the protests that took place in Orumiyeh after the election and invite further scrutiny by the security services. He added that demonstrations in Orumiyeh were much smaller than elsewhere and voters more discrete in their support for Mousavi, in large part because of a large MOIS regional office there. Comment: Our contact remains eager to develop relationships with US universities and regularly contacts us via phone and e-mail from Iran. Asked if his contacts with IRPO may have led to his problems, he intimated that his family had powerful friends in Tehran who were supportive of greater educational ties between Iran and the US. His problems most likely had come from zealous local officials, he said, and he felt safe in continuing contacts with us.

¶17. (C) Suffering for Art's Sake: An Iranian artist and gallery owner told us this week that many Iranian artists were moving further underground or selling their art abroad. She said that Iranian gallery owners and artists had come under more intense scrutiny in the past year, after an ill-advised exhibition that included paintings showing nudity. Authorities had required all galleries to be re-licensed and conducted background checks on the owners and had raided the homes of some art owners to confiscate "immoral" paintings. Further, the conservative cleric recently named to head the agency licensing art galleries had stated that Islam and religious themes were the only suitable subjects for artists. The Ahmadinejad administration had also stated its intent to stop all government support for artists. Asked about Mir Hossein Mousavi's presidency at the Iranian Academy of Arts, she said he had done very little to support artists although the art community had expected greater freedom if he had been elected.
RICHARDSON